Adaptable and Remarkable: Cat Breeds of the Middle East -1251 words

In the Middle East, people consider cats to be bringers of bad luck. However, the Middle East is the home to several breeds of exotic feline. From the most recently discovered Arabian Mau to the ever-popular Persian, the cats of the Middle East make affectionate and loyal pets.

Arabian Mau

Among one of the oldest natural breeds, the Arabian Mau has existed for more than 1,000 years. It is mostly a feral cat that lives in and around cities in the United Arab Emirates. Its name derives from "mau," the Arab word for cat. The World Cat Association only recently has accepted the Mau as a breed. The German-based breed association made this announcement during a 2005 Dubai cat show.

Coloration and appearance

The Arabian Mau has short fur that is rougher than its European counterparts. It is a medium sized cat with long, high legs and large pointed ears. Its ears are useful in helping it stay cool in the desert heat. Its fur is spotted and comes in many colors, usually a combination of black, brown, gray and white.

Temperament

The Arabian Mau makes an exceptional family pet. It is very adaptable, having lived among humans for so long. It is intelligent, curious and playful. It loves to jump and uses its long, high-set hind legs to propel it into bookshelves and curio cabinets. This active cat needs plenty of playtime and attention. Interestingly, the Mau will only breed with other Maus; it does not breed with other types of cat.

Grooming

Since the Mau is a short-haired breed with no undercoat, it requires minimal grooming. A quick run-through with a brush to remove dead hairs and stimulate its coat once in a while is enough to keep it looking its best. Like all cats, it occasionally needs its nails trimmed.

Persian cat

The Persian has been a popular cat since the late 1870s when it made an appearance at the first cat show, which was held at the Crystal Palace in London. Queen Victoria had two Blue Persians. The breed has been seen in Europe since the 1500s when it was likely brought over by visiting tradesmen. It did not make it over to North America until the 1800s.

Coloration and appearance

The Persian is a broad-bodied, long haired cat breed with a large round head and heavy short-boned legs. Its tail is short relative to its size, and with its large eyes and short, sometimes flat muzzle, features a sweet expression. Its trademark is its long silky coat, which appears to shimmer and comes in 80 different colors. The most popular color is solid silver.

Temperament

The Persian has a sweet, docile disposition. It has often been called "furniture with fur," but in reality is no more inactive than other cats. It is quite playful and affectionate, yet it is never demanding. While it does best in quiet, calm households, it can adapt to a noisier, more active environment with ease.

Grooming

The Persian's long silky coat is prone to matting and requires daily brushing to maintain its appearance. Many Persian owners also trim the hair around the anus to prevent feces from becoming stuck. It is best kept as an indoor cat and it should be conditioned to accept bathing while it is young.

Turkish Van cat

The Turkish Van Cat is native to the Lake Van area of Turkey and the bordering regions of Syria, Iran, Iraq and Russia. It may be the oldest breed of cat; there are depictions of a feline resembling the Van on pottery dating back to 5000 B.C.. There have been Vans in Europe beginning in 1095 when returning soldiers from the Crusades brought them home from Turkey. The cat became recognized as a breed in England in 1969 and 1993 in North America.

Coloration and appearance

The Van has a distinct piebald color pattern -- it has a white body with colored markings restricted to its head and tail. It has a soft, semi-long-haired cashmere-like coat that is water repellant. It is one of the largest breeds of cat, with males weighing 18 pounds and females 8 pounds at maturity. Different colored eyes are common in the Van, a prized trait in its native land.

Temperament

The Van is a very energetic cat that loves to jump. It loves to be up high, where it can survey its surroundings and its people. Because of its love for heights, it is prone to knocking things off high shelves. It is affectionate and bonds closely with one or two people, usually those with whom it has the most initial contact. The bonds last a lifetime, and are so strong that Vans are not good candidates for second homes. It loves water and will swim if given the chance.

Grooming

Its coat is semi-long but has no undercoat and is not prone to matting. A good brushing once or twice a week is all the Van requires to keep its coat in good condition.

Bahraini Dilmun (Delmun) cat

The Bahraini Dilmun cat is a naturally evolved breed that is native to the island of Bahrain. Its existence is in danger due to cross-breeding with abandoned stray Persian and Siamese cats. Native Bahrainis hold the breed in disdain, while Bahrain's large expatriate community seeks to preserve it.

Coloration and appearance

The Delmun is a sleek, spotted, short-haired breed. It is a spotted cat, with the most common coloration being brown spotted tabby. Red spotted tabby occurs as well. Like the Arabian Mau, the Delmun has large ears, an adaptation to help it keep cool in its hot, desert environment.

Temperament

The Dilmun is a quiet cat that vocalizes mostly at suppertime. It usually bonds with one person and due to its hunter nature, can be taught tricks. Although not affectionate, the Dilmun is a steadfast companion.

Grooming

Since the Dilmun is a short-haired breed, it requires minimal grooming. Like other desert cats, it has no undercoat and sheds minimally.

Turkish Angora

Originating in Turkey, the Turkish Angora takes its name from the city of Angora (present-day Ankara.) In the early 1900s, it nearly disappeared as a separate breed when Persian cat breeders used it to strengthen their lines. At about that time, the Turkish government started a breeding program to preserve it. American breeders used two cats from this program to establish the breed in North America.

Coloration and appearance

Although white remains a common and popular Angora color, the breed can come in other colors, both solid and patterned. It has a delicate appearance that belies its agile strength. The Angora's coat is semi-long and feels soft and silky.

Temperament

The Angora is an ideal pet for families with children. This affectionate cat loves to play and be the center of attention. It is mischievous and if left to its own devices for too long, will find some trouble to get into. It loves to jump and climb up into high places. It gets along with other pets so long as the others recognize it as the alpha animal.

Grooming

While it is classified as a semi-long-haired cat, the Angora doesn't require too much grooming. Its coat doesn't mat easily. All it needs is a good brushing once or twice a week.

Although the people of the Middle East don't like cats much, felines have thrived along-side them for millennia. Adaptable creatures, the cats of the Middle East will doubtless continue to thrive and to worm themselves into human homes and hearts.

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